

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS: HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN AMERICA

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The following article is from *The New American*, July 21, 1997. This issue of the magazine, titled "Educating for Global Control," contains several excellent reports documenting the humanization and internationalization of education and government intrusion into the home. The following is a description of some of the articles--

Whose Children: The meltdown of public education is just one aspect of full-blown culture war that will decide who has stewardship of the child--the parents or the state.

Education and Freedom: The disintegration of education can only lead to the degradation of our freedom.

Lost Art of Reading: Look-say/whole-language teaching methods are depriving millions of children of the joy of reading.

Moral Illiteracy: Today's students are being schooled in every imaginable perversion--and then told to decide for themselves what is right and wrong.

Outcome-Based Education: Change agents hope to condition students, not to think for themselves, but to respond in a predictable fashion to state-imposed stimuli.

Rewriting the Past: A small group of "progressive" elites determined early this century how history would be taught in America's schools.

School-to-Work: Behind the merger of education and labor policy is a plan to create easily managed workers whose careers are determined by government bureaucrats.

Federal School Master: President Clinton hopes to nationalize public education even as he preaches local control.

International Control: The UN's "Rights of the Child" convention poses an ominous threat to parents and their children.

The State as Family: Government is steadily expanding its influence over children from the classroom right into their homes.

Private Alternatives: Many American families are discovering the joy and success of educating their children at home.

Vital Resources: Private and homeschoolers have access to an amazing wealth of curricula and other resources.

These reports can be obtained in the July 21, 1997 issue of The New American. Single copies of this special issue are \$2.50. Ten copies \$12.50. Twenty-five copies \$22.50. One hundred copies \$75. Order from The New American, P.O. Box 8040, Appleton, WI 54913-9895. The New American website is <http://www.jbs.org/>.

Please note that we are not members of the John Birch Society (publishers of The New American), nor are we promoters of this society. The Birch Society is a secular organization dedicated to "free market economics, traditional morality, and the defense of the Constitution of the United States as envisioned by our Founders." These are noble goals, in an earthly sense, and though we share an interest in all three of these matters, we do not have the promotion of these as a life goal. Our commission is given in the New Testament Scriptures and is fulfilled through the New Testament church as ordained by the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not, therefore, seeking to establish the kingdom of God in this present time, but to preach the Word of God to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:18-20). Our warfare is not against human conspirators, but against the rulers and principalities of the darkness of this world (Eph. 6:12). At the same time, we are concerned about conditions in our nation and world; we are affected by things around us; and we know that sound information is important. In this context we have found many of the Birch reports to be helpful. The principle of our church's day school gave me this special issue of The New American. He has discovered that many members of our church are not aware of the extent to which humanism and globalism has invaded the public education system of our land. To help educate them, he purchased bulk copies of this special issue. As I read through the reports, I felt that some of the pastors and educators who read our material might, in turn, be interested in making these available to their own people. Parents might be interested in knowing more about what is going on in the field of education.

Now to the article "Before the Public Schools," from The New American, July 21, 1997 --

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Gary Benoit

Not surprisingly, the education and opinion cartels claim that the demise of the public school system would mean the demise of education. They paint a bleak picture of a nation of unschooled illiterates who would not even be able to read and write, much less acquire technological or scientific expertise. As is the case with so much of what is presented as "conventional wisdom," however, the truth is exactly the opposite.

Those who honestly seek the truth need only to examine the history of this country from colonial days until well into the 19th century. During that vast stretch of time, education, with

the exception of a few "common" schools in New England, was conducted in an atmosphere of free enterprise based on the preferences of the parents. The one-room school and homeschooling were common forms of education. Private schools supported by the parents or by churches or charitable institutions flourished without the benefit of government subsidies. Parents determined how and what their children would be taught and how much of their resources (in time and money) to devote to their education.

The products of this laissez-faire approach to education were not intellectually handicapped by the absence of government largess, educators, and facilities. Without compulsory attendance laws and other controls mandating a "good" education, they somehow managed to launch the world's "greatest experiment in human liberty" - an experiment that quickly transformed a supposedly backward wilderness nation into the envy of the collectivist old world. "Of the 117 men who signed the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution," Samuel Blumenfeld notes in his book *Is Public Education Necessary?*, "one out of three had had only a few months of formal schooling, and only one in four had gone to college." Benjamin Franklin, Blumenfeld notes, "was taught to read by his father and attended a private school for writing and arithmetic. Thomas Jefferson studied Latin and Greek under a tutor."

Rutherford Institute founder John White-head, in his book *Home Education and Constitutional Liberties*, notes that many Americans from various walks of life were educated primarily at home, including Presidents George Washington, James Madison, John Quincy Adams, and Abraham Lincoln. Regarding the latter two, Whitehead elaborates: "John Quincy Adams never attended a formal school until he entered Harvard [a private institution] at the age of fourteen. President Abraham Lincoln likewise received all of his education, except one year, through home instruction."

Not just these famous Americans, but the common man, possessed a high degree of literacy and understanding prior to the establishment of the public school system as the most common form of schooling. John Adams stated in 1765: "[A] native of America who cannot read or write is as rare an appearance ... as a comet or an earthquake."

The enduring *Federalist Papers* of 1787 and 1788 provides compelling evidence that Adams was not exaggerating. Originally written as a series of 85 newspaper columns to "sell" the Constitution to the man on the street, these *Papers* today offer a reading challenge to many of our college graduates.

But the colonial and post-colonial generations of Americans not only knew how to read and write; they also possessed values that are under attack today - self-reliance, diligence, respect for authority, perseverance, honesty, hard work, bravery, etc. But how could it have been otherwise? Because the parents controlled the education of their children, they were able to transmit to their offspring the same traditional values they had grown up with.

The 19th century set of McGuffey Readers, which dominated the education market for decades, is a testament to the impressive quality of both the literary and the moral instruction of that time period. These readers became so popular that during their heyday approximately half of all American children learned to read with them. Between 1836 and 1850 alone, seven million copies of the McGuffey Readers were sold, even though the population at the time was less than 23 million.

Altogether, more than 100 million copies were published, and they were especially popular in the American south and west - regions a few smug sophisticates in the east might have viewed as being "backward." Unlike the "see Spot run" look-say/whole-language drivel contained in the expensive public school readers of today, the McGuffey selections presented valuable moral lessons and good writing in a form that children could enjoy and understand.

Tragically, many Americans mistakenly believe that the public school system of today constitutes an integral part of our form of government and cannot conceive of its eventual elimination. What they fail to recognize, of course, is that such a separation of school and state would not constitute a revolutionary new development in the history of this country but a welcome return to our philosophical and cultural roots.